

Abstract 389

TITLE: Symposium Summary HIV/AIDS, Power and Intimate Relationships Part I: Gender And Safe Sex Negotiation

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Models of HIV risk and prevention, to be relevant for women, need to take into account not only individual factors, but also the relationship within which risky sexual behavior occurs, and cultural factors that influence intimate behavior. Interpersonal power within intimate relationships is receiving increasing attention in the study of heterosexual HIV risk. This symposium is the first of two addressing different aspects of HIV/AIDS, power and intimate relationships: (1) Gender and Safer Sex Negotiation, and (2) Measuring Interpersonal Power.

The first presentation provides a good overview of direct and indirect ways to consider relationship and context in studying heterosexual risk. It examines sexual empowerment, i.e., the extent to which women feel in control of their sexual lives. Sexual behavior is viewed in an historical context by taking into account women's history of sexual coercion and rape. The importance of the relationship is given further emphasis by distinguishing between main and non main partners, and considering partner attitudes and expected reactions to safer sex negotiation.

The second presentation also considers women's perceptions of control this time over the use of male condoms, and decisionmaking control in the relationship as well as fear of coercion and violence. It tests the hypothesis that the female condom is useful for women who feel they have little control over safer sex decisions, and/or have partners who resist the male condom.

The third presentation uses a social power model, which identifies several bases of power, to characterize women's and men's strategies for negotiating safer sex.

The final presentation explores what 'empowerment' means for women living with HIV. It is viewed as a process that begins with awareness, and passes through several stages before affecting women's behavior or relationships. Only with practice over time is it expected to result in safer sexual behavior.

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